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ABSTRACT

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), a private, nonprofit body, was established in 1987 to address the need for uniform teaching criteria and improved methods for gauging how well such standards are met. The NBPTS is comprised of 63 members who are teachers (the majority), school administrators, local board members, state governors (past and present), teacher educators, children's advocates, and business leaders. The board expects to issue its first teacher certificates in 1993. This digest discusses why such a board is necessary, how it will achieve its goals, and what impact it is expected to make. References available from the ERIC database are included. (ED)

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NATIONAL BOARD FOR PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS

ERIC Digest 88-6

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National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

Background

The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy recommended the creation of a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) to address the need for uniform teaching criteria and improved methods of assessment for gauging how well such standards are met. The Forum hopes to do for teaching what the Carnegie Corporation did for medical standards and prestige through the Flexner Report (1910). That report made specific recommendations for improving the quality of medical education and provided the impetus for revolutionary advances in the training of physicians.

While not everyone would agree that teaching is like practicing medicine (Haberman, 1986, pp. 719-722), many seem to agree with the Forum's major report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, that teaching needs to be improved (Carnegie Forum, 1986). The Forum's answer to the problem was to launch the NBPTS, a private, nonprofit body, with Carnegie Corporation funding of five million dollars over a five year period (Report on Education Research, 1988, p. 5). The Board has 63 members including teachers (the majority), school administrators, local board members, governors (past and present), teacher educators, children's advocates, and business leaders (Getting Ready, 1988, p. 1). The Board, which was established in May 1987, expects to issue its first teacher certificates in 1993 (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1988, p. 2).

The Board's present agenda concerns the formulation of policy and resolution of the following questions:

- What will certification represent?
- How should certification be structured?
- What skill levels should certification signify?
- What type and combination of tests should be used for assessment?
- What is the connection between board certification and teacher education?

How can consistent national assessment procedures be maintained? (National Governors' Association 1988, pp. 2-4).

Why Is A Board Necessary?

A nationally recognized board is expected to have the authority and support to take steps to upgrade the quality of teaching and public education. This is necessary to increase public confidence in teachers and to win support for higher pay (Caldwell, 1986, p. 1). A national certification board would also raise the status of teachers and support their efforts to develop professionally (NBPTS, p. 3). National certification would also help schools to attract and retain an adequate supply of highly trained teachers who will be needed to assume new roles and responsibilities in restructured schools (Carnegie Forum, p. 41).

The efficiencies involved in national certification are also compelling arguments in its favor. A national effort would bring economies of scale to the costly, time-consuming process of developing, administering, and updating assessment procedures.

Furthermore, a national system would facilitate the geographic mobility of teachers by eliminating the need for them to satisfy different state requirements (Shulman & Sykes, 1986, p. 24).

The political realities facing educators present, for some, the most compelling reason for enacting national certification. The reams of national reform reports by private groups, and the readiness of legislatures to pass laws governing education are a continuing sign of low public confidence in the profession. Such interference is likely to continue until significant changes are made in teacher training and certification. Teacher response to the Carnegie formulation has been mixed, however. Some suspect that the business community heavily influenced the Forum's report. Others object that teacher-educators are under-represented on the Board. Still others oppose the Forum's recommendations that teacher-education programs be extended a fifth year. Other criticisms target national certification as an infringement of states' rights in licensing educators; as an additional hurdle that might discourage minorities from teaching; or as an uncertain attempt to measure and predict successful teaching by assessment (Kowalski, 1988, pp. 3-5).

It is clear, however, that unless the education community offers a superior alternative, its resistance to the Carnegie formula will be seen as a desire to evade scrutiny and an admission that education has no distinct body of knowledge. The result may be the elimination of schools of education, and an increase in attempts by external groups to influence pedagogy, further diminishing the role of teachers in their own profession (Ibid., pp. 7-9).

How Will the Board Achieve Its Goals?

The board hopes to accomplish its agenda by offering professional certification to teachers who qualify under its new standards and methods of assessment. National board certification will be different from state licensing or certification. A state's license, required to teach within its jurisdiction, merely indicates that a licensee satisfies a minimum level of requirements, generally equivalent to entry-level ability. National certification, on the other hand, would be voluntary, and would signify achievement of a higher level of competence, based on criteria set by the profession (Shulman & Sykes, pp. ii, 25-26).

National certification will be awarded to candidates who pass a series of assessments. The Forum has recommended a three-stage assessment procedure that includes written tests and long-term observation of a teacher's classroom performance (Caldwell, pp. 45-46). The Carnegie Corporation has funded research and development of alternative methods of assessment since 1986, and a number of prototypes have already been developed and field-tested (Haertel, 1987, p. 23). The Board will consider these and other efforts in shaping its final assessment product.

The Forum's recommendations are not binding on the Board. Many decisions, therefore, have yet to be made concerning



policies and procedures, e.g., who is eligible to sit for board exams. The task force recommends the exams be open to all college graduates, but many teacher educators want education training to be a prerequisite (Evangelauf, 1987, p. A50).

The Board must also determine whether to offer basic or advanced certificates or both, and for how long—limited, renewable periods or a lifetime (Ibid). Other unresolved questions include which fields to offer certification in; how to fund the assessment and certification process; how to provide remedial assistance for teachers who fail an assessment; and whom to allow access to individual assessment data (Caldwell, p. 43).

What Impact Does the Board Expect to Make?

The policies of a national board, however voluntary, will broadly influence all levels of education, affecting teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and boards of education (Ibid, p. 48). In addition, national standards will reshape the teaching profession and teacher training, providing support remains strong and progress uninterrupted. Colleges can be expected to revamp their teacher education programs to comply with the new criterion. And states could adopt national standards for state licensing and certification procedures, or even waive license requirements for those already board-certified (Evangelauf, p. A50).

The board has already been endorsed by a number of organizations, including two major teachers unions (the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers), the National Governors' Association, and the Education Commission of the States. However, due to the slow pace of change and the need for two million working teachers to adjust to the new system, observers do not expect to see dramatic changes in teaching for another decade (Ibid).

References

Many of the following references—those identified with an ED or EJ number—have been abstracted and are in the ERIC database. The journal articles should be available at most

research libraries. The documents (citations with an ED number) are available on microfiche in ERIC microfiche collections at more than 700 locations. Documents also can be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. Call (800) 227-3742 for price and order information. For a list of ERIC collections in your area or for information on submitting documents to ERIC, contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 610, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 293-2450.

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON TEACHER EDUCATION

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